

Out Of Mormonism

Ed Decker's Personal Story



Being a Mormon was really something special! There was a spirit of having arrived in the very center of eternity that came with membership. The image was one of wholesomeness, industry and happiness. There was a built-in self-esteem that came with the name "Mormon", a strange, proud kind of humility, an urgency to excel.

So many members are converts. They seem to be the ones with that special zeal for the Gospel. They had lived that life of partial truth in the darkness of some other church. They are the ones who have been reached by the great missionary vision of the L.D.S. Church. They represent the "fruit" of the truth that Mormonism is the "only true church".

Once the basic truths of the LDS doctrines were explained in the missionary lessons, and the urgently sought-after, mystical "burning in the bosom" received, the convert is joyfully baptized and confirmed a member of the "only true church" and given the "Gift of the Holy Ghost".

Through the Sunday school, priesthood and auxiliary lessons and approved books by the General Authorities, the deeper meanings and the eternal consequences of the Articles of Faith would be understood and defined in the context of each life.

When the mysteries of the temple ritual were experienced, received and accepted as the infinite truth of life, there would never be a natural thought process that could ever accept any other truth to life than the doctrines of the Mormon Church. The time could never come when the doctrines of the faith would fall, only our own personal ability to live all the "laws and ordinances" of the gospel.

In a promotional pamphlet I picked up at Temple Square, there is a picture of the Christ Statue located at the Visitors Center, with the caption, "IN 1830 THE ALMIGHTY RESTORED HIS CHURCH TO EARTH AGAIN." On the facing page it continues, "The restored church is known as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, with headquarters in Salt Lake City. It possesses the divine priesthood of God. It is headed by prophets and apostles as was the church in the days of Peter and Paul."

"It invites all men to receive its message, for it is a message of salvation for everyone, whether Jew or gentile, bond or free."

Mormonism aggressively takes that message, prepared in smooth, professional packaging to tens of thousands of people every day. Brian Grant, a convert to the church and then Director of Public Relations for the church in Great Britain, explained why they are so successful.

Their message is welcomed by people because, "First and foremost, I think there is in all people what might be termed a soul hunger." He explained, "There is a desire to know who they are, why they are here and where they are going. For me as an individual, that's why I came into the church. The second reason the church is growing is that it involves people in the way that I didn't find in any previous place that I had looked at or belonged to."

I knew exactly what he was talking about. As a young man, I had a deep-seated, urgent desire to serve God, to be what He wanted me to be. During my teen years, I served as the area YMCA Chaplain for the High School Christian Hi-Y and Tri-Hi-Y Clubs. I served regularly as an acolyte at the altar in the small church parish in my hometown.

Yet, try as I might, I still felt that there was something missing in my relationship with God, something that was not being fulfilled in my

involvement with school and church activities. I did not even know how to describe what that something was.

I knew that God was out there somewhere and I was down here and unable to connect with Him. I went to my pastor one day and told him what was bothering me, trying to explain the yearning in my heart for "more of God" in my life. I didn't realize then that my heart was crying out to be one with the Lord, as Paul describes in the book of Galatians.

The pastor looked me squarely in the eye for a moment, with a very puzzled look, and then, quietly but firmly, told me to leave his office and not bother him with such nonsense again. With the sting of rejection flashing in my heart, I nodded my agreement and left his office and the faith of my youth. The next several years, I lived the life of a very cautious agnostic. If God were there, he would have to seek me out. I had done all the looking I was going to do. I slid into the world around me.

I left for college in Logan, Utah, where I attended several different Protestant churches a few times -- always alone, always with a cynical, protective spirit. It was during this time that God moved in spite of my hardened heart. I was a diabetic, having taken daily insulin shots for several years.

Times were difficult, financially, and it came down one day to the choice of using what little money I had to buy food or insulin. I remember speaking out to God with an angry heart and saying,

"God, I only have enough money to buy my insulin or buy some food. If I buy insulin, I am going to die from starving. If I buy food, I am going to die from lack of insulin. It's one or the other. I would rather die with a full stomach, but, if you want to heal me, you can. I am not asking for help, God, I am just telling you how it is, and you can do what you want. Amen."

That was as close to a real personal prayer as I could come. I bought my food and ate it with the belief that it would probably be my last. God did heal me that day, and over 60 years later, I still have yet to take that next injection of insulin. God was so very close to me but I still could not find him.

A few more years went by and I married an inactive Mormon girl, with whom I had attended high school. We lived away from our family and friends in a small town where I worked as a YMCA program secretary. Again, even in that kind of work, I had managed to stay away from the God who would not let me in.

That was when the Mormon missionaries knocked on the door. They not only wanted to talk about God, but they did not want to stop! When they found out that my wife was an inactive member and we were a lonely couple in a new town, we were suddenly surrounded by

an instant family of people who were happy and excited to find us in their midst.

I felt accepted as I had never been before, and the missionaries were to spend uncountable hours in our home, sharing their lessons about a God who wanted to let me in. Mostly, I remember the joy of laughing at the fun of being loved and wanted. When I was asked if I wanted to be baptized into membership in the LDS Church, something deep inside me kept holding me off. Then one day, the elders came with solemn faces and I was told that the senior elder was being transferred. He was extremely sad that he would not be able to be the one to lead me into the waters of baptism.

It was more than I could bear. That Saturday, just before he left, I became a member of the Mormon Church. In the beginning, I felt that being a Mormon was really wonderful! I believed that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints possessed the divine priesthood of God, and that it was the "only true church" because prophets and apostles headed it up just as was the church in the days of Peter and Paul.

I wish I could tell you that the years that followed were the happiest years of my life, but it was not the case. As the newness wore off, more and more of the "laws and ordinances" replaced the joy and laughter.

The church was the absolute and we were always to be judged by its standard of performance. Instead of having that oneness I sought with God, I soon discovered that God was on the other side of the church.

The church spoke for God, it judged for God and it determined God's program for our lives. I can only remember living our lives like yo-yos. When we were up, we were very, very up and when we were down, we were at the end of the string. In spite of being sealed for time and all eternity in the temple, our marriage ended in failure after almost 14 years and five children.

The unbearable guilt of not being able to prevent the loss of our family's future in a celestial glory and the ache I had sitting in a strange ward, without my children by my side, were more than I could handle. I retreated into my agnostic shell again, and began a new life, away from the pressures of the church. I knew that I had failed the Mormon god, but felt he had failed me, too. I wanted to be one with him, like the Bible said, but he was always at arms length, examining my worthiness.

I couldn't even go back into his temple without an approval by two levels of leaders endorsing my righteousness. I let him know that we had a score to settle, and I was fighting mad. I can remember having no fear of him.

Even while I never doubted a single tenet of the Mormon faith, I had no illusions about my situation. I didn't need a special revelation to know that divorce was far from God's best. I could tell that just from looking into the eyes of the children I loved so dearly. I had failed the earthly test, but was convinced the deck was stacked from the start. Time heals a whole lot, and postpones just as much.

My ex-wife and I each remarried and began new lives that we hoped would be a far cry above the last marriage. I rejoice that in my ignorant bliss, the Lord selected a very special woman, Carol, to fill that empty void in my life. Carol and I are best of friends, married now for 46 years.

Not only did Carol pour out measure upon measure of love to me, in a way I never knew possible, but also that same love spilled over to my children in a very extraordinary way. Few single women are prepared to step into the role of instant mother of five very active children who arrive each summer and holiday weekend in a whirlwind of arms, legs, suitcases and overactive vocal cords.

Much of Carol's understanding, however, came from her own youth, growing up in a broken home and spending time in the care of relatives and children's homes. During those years, she tenaciously protected her younger sister as though it was them against the whole world.

Because of her own loss of a real childhood, and because of the strain we had in trying to give my five children all the love and commitment they needed, we both felt it wise not to plan a family of our own. Besides, we both had busy careers and active lives. God did not fit into my schedule much anymore, and I really didn't miss him.

Church attendance was limited to going whenever the children were there and the home teachers provided happy, superficial chats each month as they came by to check upon the Decker clan. Then one day, Carol discovered that she was pregnant! This was a shock beyond shocks. Our carefully planned life was suddenly at tilt. For a week, Carol was inconsolable.

Then, as if by special dispensation from above, Carol became a super mom, preparing the nursery, months in advance, and dragging me off to special natural childbirth classes. I remember racing to the hospital that June night in 1973, rehearsing our "parts" all the way.

As I stood there in my green delivery room suit, one of the nurses asked me what I wanted, a boy or a girl, and I laughed nervously, saying, "It really doesn't matter, I've had enough of both. I just want a healthy baby." What seemed like minutes later, I was standing next to the doctor as our son, Jason, was born.

As he emerged into the world, the doctor turned to the nurse and casually said, "We have some congenital deformity here." The nurse

carried the baby to a nearby table and I practically climbed over her to see the child and this deformity.

The doctor showed me that our son was born without normal outer ears and ear canals. He shook his head and sadly remarked that this was some indication that the baby probably had serious internal problems, as well. I don't remember leaving the hospital that night. I am sure I ran out and left my wife alone. I raced home and threw myself upon the floor of our family room and began to sob.

It was a curse from God for my unworthiness, for my failure to live the highest level of my priesthood, for not attending my meetings and for the thousands of sins uncovered by righteous works. I knew I was at fault because I had taught that very doctrine myself as an active LDS teacher.

I pulled out the reference book, *Mormon Doctrine*, By LDS Apostle and key theologian, Bruce R. McConkie.

There under the heading, CURSINGS, was the pronouncement:

“Cursings are the opposite of blessings, and the greater the opportunity given a people to earn blessings, the more severe will be the cursings heaped upon them, if they do not measure up and gain the proffered rewards.”

No one had to tell me I had failed to measure up. Not only was God exercising his wrath upon me for my failures, but he was doing it through this little baby, whose sin was being my son. I was guilty, not only of failing God again, but the guilt of causing God's wrath to fall upon my son was more than I could bear. I screamed curses back at God that night! I cursed him until my voice was gone and I slept with clenched fists, exhausted upon the floor.

The late Dr. Keith Rodaway, our pediatrician, who was a committed Christian, must have thought I was a wild man because of my appearance the next morning. He gave me a terrible scolding for my behavior towards my wife on the previous evening. Afterwards, I went to my wife and cried, "Carol, why has God done this terrible thing to us?"

She calmly told me that God loved us, and He loved our son, and we were very special to God because He gave us this special child. She was glowing with a joy I had never seen before. She had made arrangements for the baby to stay in the room with her and just refused to let me upset her. There was a peace that was never there before.

I had failed to realize was that while I was at home cursing God, Ann, a Christian girl who worked in my wife's office, being prompted by the Holy Spirit, had come to the hospital in the middle of the night to share the peace of Jesus with Carol.

My wife smiled at me and said, "Ed, we can praise God in all things. We can praise Him this morning for this precious child." She handed me a book called "Praise Works" and said, "Read it!"

It was just filled with people praising God in all kinds of terrible things. I would read a story and throw the book against the wall and kick it for good measure. I read the whole book that way. One afternoon, I watched as our dog sat there chewing up a corner of the book, and I finally was able to mutter my first "Praise the Lord!"

Carol came home with an entirely new outlook on life. She was always smiling and some of her new friends who always seemed to be around, also smiled and talked about how good the "Lord" was. It was enough to make me choke. I would go out of my way to insult them, even though they would just smile at me as they left.

I knew the real reason for Jason's problem. I was the one that would have to see him go through life without hearing his mother tell him she loved him, without ever hearing laughter. It was my sin that was going to separate him from the rest of the world.

When Jason was several months old, Carol's maternity leave was up and she made arrangements for the young wife of one of my employees to watch Jason in her home during the day. What I didn't realize was that Don's dad was the pastor of a Christian church in the neighborhood. While we were at work, these people were praying for

God to actually heal Jason. They believed that God was going to do a miracle in his little life.

Not only was it a basic doctrine of my church that these Protestant pastors were tools of Satan, but the thought of having these people actually lay hands on my son would have been more than I could have borne. I guess that's why they didn't tell me.

The God they prayed to did not seem to take a whole lot of stock in my doctrinal positions, because He gave Jason hearing where he had no ears to hear.

Within several months, at the University of Washington's hearing clinic, Dr. Donaldson had Jason hooked up to a hearing aid that transmitted sound through the bone, and Jason was on his way to a series of miracles that would fill a book of their own.

Today, Jason is a committed Christian witness of God's healing power, and he has hearing in his one ear, with "God still working on the other." He is now married to a wonderful wife with two great children, a very successful realtor, outstanding fly fisherman and with his passion for the lost and with a prophetic anointing, he is serving the Lord as one of God's mighty men!

Carol and her friends were so excited; but I could hardly even smile. They didn't have the power of the Melchizedek Priesthood. They were led by a false teacher and a lackey of Satan. How could this be?

I began calling Don (the husband/son in this mess) into my office and would ridicule his silly god and this ever-wonderful Jesus of his. He would only smile and tell me he would pray about what I had said.

Carol kept asking me to go to Don's father's church with her, and I kept telling her that we already had a church and we had better get ourselves in right standing there.

Heavy with guilt, I had determined that we could no longer avoid the responsibility of getting right with the Mormon god, and she quietly began to attend the LDS Church with me.

We even had Jason blessed by a young Mormon friend who flew across the country just to give Jason the priesthood blessing. Normally, this is done by the father, but I was still did not feel worthy enough to do it myself. Having Kurt do it was really very special.

Carol finally convinced me that since she was willing enough to go to the LDS Church cheerfully, the least I could do was to just "visit" the "other" church and see what it was like. I agreed to go, but only under the condition that we would get there late and sit in the back row, so that I could get out of there before anyone could get near me at the end of the service. I told her that I would be out the door as that preacher said "Amen" and if she wanted a ride home, she should be ready to move out when I did.

True to plan, we arrived ten minutes late, but I had a lot to learn about Christian churches. The only seats left were in the front row. The usher gently put his hand upon my shoulder and before I knew what hit me, I was staring up at a man who had a Bible in his hand and knew how to use it. When he finally said, "Amen" I jumped up only to run into a hundred people who just had to say, "hello" and "Praise the Lord, we are praying for you!"

For a year we bounced back and forth between the two churches. I was in literal torment. These Christians seemed to have that one-on-one relationship with God that I sought so diligently for so many years; but in spite of their inner peace and the glow of their hearts, they didn't have the restored gospel. They just had a little part of the truth; we Mormons had the FULLNESS.

But if they only had a part of the truth, why did they have such an assurance of their Salvation? Why did they keep talking about Jesus and Calvary all the time? Didn't they understand that Salvation came only after all we can do to obey the laws and ordinances?

All the years of my struggles with God came down to an explosion on the first Sunday of January in 1975. We were walking out of the LDS Fast and Testimony Meeting and Carol remarked, "Ed, there was something missing in that meeting today. Something very important." I replied, "It was a great testimony meeting. I really enjoyed the testimonies. Several people even cried. How could you

not like it?" She just lowered her head and told me that something was still missing.

I stopped at the car and looked at her for a moment. "What could possibly be missing, Carol?" She looked up and just said, "Jesus. No one mentioned Jesus." It was like a knife had just stabbed through my head. I knew that I was in trouble with God -- deep trouble, like never before.

This thing with Jesus just plain frightened me. He was supposed to be my elder brother, one who showed the way for our own perfection. I knew inside that something was wrong and I was going to have to face this Jesus the Christians kept talking about.

That night, Carol asked me to go to the Christian church and I knew I dared not refuse. All day, I had struggled with something I could not put into words. It was as though the years had rolled back and I was that young, hurting acolyte all over again.

That night at this small Christian church, they were having a communion celebration. People were standing and giving testimony of the power of Jesus in their lives, praising Him and singing songs of worship. As the elders prepare the communion table, they were wiping away tears from their eyes.

Before I realized what had taken place, I sat there (in the front row) with the elements of "gentile" communion in my hands. I whispered

to Carol, "What am I supposed to do with this? It's GENTILE communion. I'm a member of the Holy Melchizedek priesthood! I can't take this communion."

Carol looked at me and asked, "Do you love Jesus, Ed?" As I nodded, she said, "Then just be quiet for once, and take communion with us!" As they blessed the bread, I joined in and quietly ate the bread, but as they blessed the little cups of grape juice and passed them to us, I lifted mine to my lips and the shock of the red juice struck a bolt of lightning through me.

For the last twenty years, I had been taking Mormon communion with white bread and water! The Blood of Jesus was missing! It was the Blood that brought the forgiveness of sin. It was at Calvary where He paid the price for my sin! No wonder these people had such peace. They had forgiveness of sin. No wonder they were weeping.

That night, Pastor Howard May had an altar call for those who wanted to have Jesus as Lord of their lives, as Savior. I went forward and fell weeping upon the altar steps and died to self and became alive in Him. I really felt the change throughout my whole body. I had died to my own self and was now alive in Him, weeping; unashamed. I became "born again."

When I stood up from that experience, I literally felt heaviness, darkness lifting off me and physically leave me. I felt cleansed inside my soul.

I have been a grateful and committed Christian for forty years now. I still remember that night when I gave my life to Jesus. I recall and enjoy the memory of that moment of death into life often. I am filled with a zeal for souls, those who are lost like I once was. It is burned into my heart and soul.

I was given a broken heart for the Mormon people, my people. I went through a time of weeping and despair in my love for them and that that love for the lost drew me into the ministry and keeps me at it all these years. I know that even at the age of 80, I am still a work in progress as the Lord continues to refine His work in me. I believe that, in Him, great things are yet to come in my life.

I know this! As long as my heart still beats this side of heaven, I am still His hand extended, because *I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. Gal 2:20*

As God began calling me to reach out to those lost in the Mormon Church, another scripture bore into my soul, lest I boast of my works for Christ, rather than His works in me. *But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. Gal 6:14*

As I stepped out with my wife and family into a life calling ministry to those lost in spiritual darkness, in faith, I felt as Paul did when he stood before King Agrippa.

Like Paul was sent to the gentiles, I knew I was sent to the Mormon people *to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.* Acts 26: 18.

Some years ago, while reading from the book, Practical Religion, by the late, great preacher, Bishop J.C. Ryle, I came across this passage, one that I have taken as a clear call for my own life. I share it with you herein.

“Zeal in religion is a burning desire to please God, to do His will, and to advance His glory in the world in every possible way. It is a desire which no man feels by nature, —which the Spirit puts in the heart of every believer when he is converted, —but which some believers feel so much more strongly than others that they alone deserve to be called “zealous” men.

This desire is so strong, when it really reigns in a man, that it impels him to make any sacrifice, to go through any trouble, to deny himself to any amount, to suffer, to work, to labor, to toil, to spend himself and be spent, and even to die, if only he can please God and honor Christ.

A zealous man in religion is pre-eminently a man of one thing. It is not enough to say that he is earnest, hearty, uncompromising, thorough-going, whole-hearted, fervent in spirit. He only sees one thing, he cares for one thing, he lives for one thing, he is swallowed up in one thing; and that one thing is to please God.

Whether he lives, or whether he dies, whether he has health, or whether he has sickness, whether he is rich, or whether he is poor, whether he pleases man, or whether he gives offense, whether he is thought wise, or whether he is thought foolish, whether he gets blame, or whether he gets praise, whether he gets honor, or whether he gets shame, for all this the zealous man cares nothing at all. He burns for one thing; and that one thing is to please God, and to advance God's glory.

If he is consumed in the very burning, he cares not for it. He is content. He feels that, like a lamp, he is made to burn; and if consumed in burning, he has but done the work for which God appointed him.

Such a one will always find a sphere for his zeal. If he cannot preach, and work, and give money, he will cry, and sigh, and pray. Yes: if he is only a pauper, on a perpetual bed of sickness, he will make the wheels of sin around him drive heavily, by continually interceding against it.

If he cannot fight in the valley with Joshua, he will do the work of Moses, Aaron, and Hur, on the hill. (Exod. xvii. 9-13.) If he is cut off from working himself, he will give the Lord no rest till help is raised up from another quarter, and the work is done. This is what I mean when I speak of “zeal” in religion.”

In Christ, I stand. All other ground is sinking sand.

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